

The First Presbyterian Church
Elizabeth, Union County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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First Presbyterian Church
Elizabeth, Union County, New Jersey

Owner: The Trustees of First Presbyterian Church

Date of Erection: 1784-1786

Architect:

Builder:

Present condition: Good; additions were made in 1851, 1890, and 1908; the present spire was built in 1901, but the general appearance of the front is the same as when built.

Number of stories: Two

Materials of construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - brick

Interior walls - celotex;
interior was rebuilt in
1851 and Gothic arches re-
placed the old flat ceiling.

Roof - pitch

Historical Data:

As far as age is concerned this is probably the oldest English speaking congregation in New Jersey. Hatfield declares that "a meeting court" was held as early as February 19, 1665-1666. There were two churches on the same site before the present one was erected. There is no description to be had of the original building because the records were destroyed in

1719. The second building was built in 1724; this was burned by the British in 1780; it had been used as a hospital by the Patriots. The present church building was built during 1784-6; it was not finished, however, until 1789. A spire was added in 1792; this was later destroyed by a tornado in 1899 and was replaced in 1901. It is an exact duplicate of the ancient model, 227 feet high, one of the finest church spires in America.

No change has been made in the appearance of the front, nor any other alterations of the exterior, excepting that in 1851 the building was extended 27 feet at the rear; a recess for an organ was added in 1890, and in 1908 a pastor's room and choir room were erected.

One of the most famous pastors of the church was the Reverend Jonathan Dickinson, who served the congregation from 1709-1747. It was during his pastorate, in 1717, that the church joined the Presbytery of Philadelphia; before this it had been an Independent or Congregational church. He was also associated with the founding of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. He was one of the original trustees under the charter granted in 1746; he served as the first president of the college. Classes probably began at the parsonage on Pearl Street.

Another famous minister was the Reverend James Caldwell, who served from 1761-1781; it was he who at the battle of Springfield in 1780, when the militia ran out of wads passed out the hymn books of the Springfield Church and exclaimed, "Now put Watts into them, boys"!

Bibliography:

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Approved:

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Rev. Dec. 1 '36 - HLB